

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis, and Administration

August 4, 2003

Mr. David Coburn
Steptoe & Johnson, LLP
1330 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1795

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 34284, Southwest Gulf Railroad Company –
Construction and Operation Exemption – Medina County, TX – Request
for Additional Information

Dear Mr. Coburn:

As you know, the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is conducting an environmental review of Southwest Gulf Railroad Company's proposed rail construction and operation in Medina County, Texas. Based on the questions received from the public through our June 12, 2003 Open House and the information gathered in our preliminary studies, we have identified several areas that we believe warrant additional or more detailed analysis. In consultation with URS Corporation (URS), SEA's independent third-party consultant for this proceeding, we have prepared a list of information we need from SGR in order for us to conduct this analysis. We are writing to request SGR to provide SEA with information on the points listed below:

Maintenance or Fueling Facility

- Comments received from the public have indicated concern about fueling operations. Information provided by SGR and our preliminary studies indicate that a rail-related maintenance or fueling facility would be constructed and operated as part of the proposed project. In order to assess potential environmental impacts from this facility, we request the following information:
 1. Please provide the footprint and location of the maintenance or fueling facility (located on a map).
 2. Please briefly describe proposed fueling and maintenance operations and spill prevention measures and procedures at the facility and how SGR would meet regulatory requirements for the amount of fuel storage it would require. If Vulcan

Materials Company (Vulcan) has a general procedure manual used in other facilities, which describes the procedures that would be used at the proposed facility, it would suffice to include a copy of it.

3. Please indicate whether the facility would be used for rail only or if it would also be used for trucks.
4. If known, please indicate the number of fuel tanks, tank size, and fuel type (vapor pressure) that would be stored at the facility. What would be the maximum amount of fuel stored? How much fuel would be used for the locomotives? If known, please indicate the number of valves, flanges, and other appurtenances. Would the facility be regulated by any permits?
5. Please indicate the general types of materials to be handled at the facility. Would materials be stored in tanks or other containers? If possible, please indicate the amount of material that would be stored.
6. Would the facility be built as part of the no-build alternative as well? If so, how would operations at the facility differ?

Switch Yard

- Information provided by SGR states that a switch yard would be built as part of the no-build alternative. In order to assess more fully the potential environmental effects of the no-build alternative, we request the following information:
 1. Please provide the footprint and location of the switch yard (located on a map).
 2. Please briefly describe proposed operations at the switch yard that would be built as part of the no-build alternative. Please indicate how operations at the switch yard would comply with Federal and state requirements. Please indicate what spill prevention measures and best management practices would be used or provide a general manual from other similar facilities for compliance with Federal and state regulations.
 3. Please indicate the general types of materials to be handled at the switch yard. Would materials be stored in tanks or other containers? Any idea of how much material would be stored?

Air Quality

- Although SGR's proposed project does not meet our thresholds for air quality analysis, based on questions received from the public, we are examining potential air quality

impacts from the proposed project. In order to assess potential effects on air quality from the action and no-build alternatives, we request the following information:

1. Would the trucks be idling while they are being unloaded or loaded at the quarry and at the switch yard? How long would they idle?
2. Please indicate how many trucks would be needed for deliveries to the local market under the proposed action.
3. Please indicate who would be responsible for operating and maintaining the trucks, and whether the trucks would be fueled off site for the action and no-build alternatives.

Vibration

- Based on public concern regarding vibration impacts to residences and cultural resources from the proposed project, we are assessing the potential vibration impacts from the proposed project. In order to assess the potential vibration effects, we request the following information:
 1. The amount of energy transmitted depends on the smoothness of the steel wheels and rail and the resonance frequencies of the vehicle suspension system and the track support system. Train type, speed, as well as the surface condition and the configuration of the system are also factors. If possible, please provide any specific information on the technical details of the trains that would be used. Information on similar trains used at other Vulcan quarries would suffice.

Noise

- Although SGR's proposed project does not meet our thresholds for noise analysis, based on questions received from the public, we are examining potential noise impacts from the proposed project. In order to assess potential effects on noise from the action and no-build alternatives, we request the following information:
 1. Please indicate the average number of locomotives per train. Please also indicate the reference sound levels for locomotives, warning horns, freight cars, idling and locomotives, if available.
 2. Please indicate the types of trucks that would be used for local markets for the action and no-build alternatives, and for long distance markets, as part of the no-build alternative.

Other Facilities

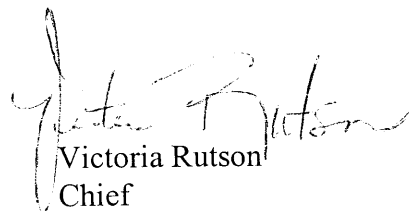
- Information provided by SGR indicates that a rail loading facility and a rail interchange facility (at the connection with the Union Pacific Railroad Company) would be constructed as part of the proposed project. In order to develop a comprehensive map of the proposed project, which includes all project components, we request the following information:
 1. Please provide a general description and the footprint and location of the rail loading facility (on a map).
 2. Please provide a general description and the footprint and location of the rail interchange facility (on a map).

Specific Questions Asked by the Public

- Please provide detailed information regarding the level of traffic over the proposed rail line, including projected initial traffic levels, an estimate of when the traffic levels would increase to the projected 2 loaded and 2 empty trains per day, and whether traffic would increase from 2 loaded trains and 2 empty trains per day in the reasonably foreseeable future.
- If possible, please indicate which streams SGR would cross by bridge for the action alternatives and any information regarding these proposed crossings.
- Please indicate whether SGR would use any chemicals for weed control or for other right-of-way maintenance activities.

Please send one copy of your response to Jaya Zyman-Ponebshek of URS and one copy to Rini Ghosh of SEA. If you have any questions or need additional information to respond to this information request, please feel free to contact me or Ms. Ghosh of my staff at (202) 565-1539. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely yours,



Victoria Rutson
Chief

Section of Environmental Analysis